

TO: House Committee on Education
FROM: Colin Robinson, Political Director, Vermont-NEA
DATE: January 18, 2023
SUBJECT: Educator Workforce

Context:

- Pre-dates the pandemic: The teacher workforce shortage, both in Vermont and nationwide, existed prior to the pandemic but has been significantly exacerbated by the pandemic. This is more acute in specific areas of instruction, like special education, and again this pre-dated the pandemic.
- Fewer people pursuing a career in education: Nationwide, the percentage of first year college students pursuing education has dropped by approximately 50% over the past 15 years.
- Difficult to retain teachers prior to the pandemic: We know that 50% of new teachers leave the profession after 5 years.
- High number of provisional and emergency licenses: Currently 1,200 teachers are working under emergency and provisional licenses.
- School support staff vacancies are very high: School support staff – paraeducators, bus drivers, food service workers, behavioral interventions, custodians – are critical to meeting the needs of students, but are very difficult to attract and retain.
- Lack of substitute teachers: There are very few available substitute teachers, if any, in some areas. This results in teachers, support staff and administrators doing their best of fill in gaps with an increased workload. With a difficult flu season and COVID still very present staff absences can be even more difficult to cover.
- Student and staff mental health: The pandemic had significant impacts on the mental health of our students, families and school staff. Our systems of mental health for students in the community is broken and while schools do their best, there are acute needs that impact students’ ability to learn. It also has a direct impact on the health of educators and their ability to teach kids, resulting in burnout.
- Compensation and working conditions: There is a long-documented teacher pay gap in the nation and in Vermont. Pay for school support staff continues to be low, as compared to other jobs that may be available. We also know that persistent challenging working conditions due to understaffing and the challenges to meet the complex needs of all students are impactful on recruitment and retention of educators.

Update from last session:

- **GrowVT-ED (Grow Your Own Program):** In August 2022 Vermont-NEA launched a “grow your own” teacher training program called GrowVT-ED which was built at the request of with seven Northeast Kingdom school districts but was made available to educators across the state. This program provides training and financial supports to educators working on a provisional license to in one year complete the Agency of Education Peer Review process and to attain their teaching license. The target participants for this program are workers who may already be working in a school like para-educators but lack a full teaching license to build a teaching career

and find permanent work. This includes individuals who may currently be on emergency or provisional licenses. The program is run by Vermont-NEA Director of Professional Program Dr. Juliette Longchamp. The Senate Committee on Education had a robust discussion and even moved language creating a pilot “Peer Review Support Grant Program” in the miscellaneous education bill, H.716. The language in H.716 anticipates 150 Vermonters accessing this program in FY23, at a cost of \$4,750 per participant, for a total of \$712,500 to be appropriated from the Education Fund to the Agency of Education. We believe that this “grown your own” model can be impactful as both a short-term way to bring teachers into the profession and has the potential for future scaling up as well. See the full January 2023 GrowVT-ED update from Dr. Julie Longchamp on the Committee website and learn more at www.growvted.org

- **Investing in the Vermont State Teachers Retirement System (Pension)** – The hard work of the Legislative Pension Task Force, including Rep. McCann, resulting in a total package solution which has improved the health of the pension. This is a benefit that teachers rely on and work hard for and know that it is supported is critical to retaining and recruiting teachers.

Possible options for action:

- **Student Loan Forgiveness/Grant Pipeline Program** – Modeled after the program for healthcare workers in Act 183 (workforce development bill), forgive loans and create a pipeline to for new teachers who work in Vermont public schools for a specific number of years. This could also be for teachers who work in rural areas, specific subject areas or high poverty schools. There is already language in statute (VSA 16 § 2869) for VSAC to administer such a program from decades ago that could be modified and funded for this purpose.
 - **Free Student Teaching Credits** - Provide all students enrolled in a teacher preparation programs, undergraduate or graduate, a guaranteed grant/loan paid directly to their college or university of up to 12 credits to cover their student teaching requirements. Currently, most aspiring teachers have to take out loans to pay for their teaching internship. This could include a requirement for those who receive it to teach in a public school in Vermont for at least five years.
 - Some states like Michigan, which passed a law in spring of 2022, have chosen to pay the student teachers directly a grant that the student can use for a purpose of their choice like tuition, living expenses, etc. In Michigan it is approximately \$9000 per eligible student.
- **Grow Your Own** – Support and fund these types of programs that allow folks to find alternative paths to licensure for both individuals already working in schools and those who may be looking to change careers. We know that only 40% of individuals who start the peer-review process complete it, but when they are supported by programs like GrowVT-ED the completion rate increases significantly. The teacher over the years who have worked with Julie Longchamp as they go through the peer-review process have a 100% success rate.
 - **Review barriers to licensure:** We need to remove the obstacles in the way of new educators without lowering standards. The AOE/VSBPE should explore alternatives. We offer multiple pathways to our students, so we need to offer multiple pathways for aspiring educators to demonstrate they have met the standards.
- **Pre-fund Peer Review Fee** – For potential teachers to complete the Agency of Education Peer Review Program workers must pay \$1200. In part because of this fee being a barrier to some perspective teachers, only 40% of those that begin the peer review process complete it. The legislature could pre-fund the fee for 500 potential teachers over the next three to four years to the tune of \$600,000 total.
- **Eliminate Teacher Licensing Fees** – Currently, all teachers need to renew their license every five years. They must pay a fee to the Agency of Education to renew. The licensing fee is currently \$50 plus \$50 per year, so for a normal five-year teacher license renewal this is currently \$300.
- **Teacher and Support Staff Compensation** – We must continue to invest in educator pay, for both teachers and support staff. As was mentioned recently, there is bill being worked on to create a tax incentive to increase pay.

- **Continue to Invest in Public Education** – We must build for the future both by investing in our students, families and educators.